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LETTER DATED 29 JUNE 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ETHIOPIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit herewith a letter addressed to you from Seyoum Mesfin, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the text of the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Duri MOHAMMED
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Letter dated 29 June 1999 from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia to the President of the Security Council

I wish to draw attention to my letter dated 14 June 1999 (S/1999/678, annex) addressed to you. I write to you once again on the same issue, which has remained a major preoccupation of my country for more than a year. This time I am writing with deep sadness over your statement of 23 June 1999 as President of the Security Council.

It is impossible for the Security Council to take the position that it does not know that aggression was committed by Eritrea against Ethiopia. The Council also knows that Ethiopia had accepted the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Framework Agreement long before Eritrea professed acceptance of the same.

It is to be recalled that since the Eritrean ostensible acceptance of the OAU peace plan in February 1999 referred to above, the major argument adduced by the Security Council and others for not pressing Eritrea to faithfully embrace the OAU Framework Agreement has concerned the so-called ambiguities contained therein which, it was said, had made the OAU peace plan susceptible to conflicting interpretations.

But that argument, as you must not fail to appreciate, has been rendered hollow by the clarification given to Eritrea by the Chairman of the OAU High-level Delegation in a letter dated 8 May 1999 addressed to the Eritrean President. That should have ended whatever hesitation the Security Council might have had about the merit of putting the necessary pressure on Eritrea to cease being an obstacle to peace, and to reverse the aggression it had committed against Ethiopia on 12 May 1998.

In this context, I wish to point out that no third party that has offered to broker peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea in the course of this crisis can ever complain about having received from Ethiopia less than the fullest cooperation. It is to be noted that, even with respect to a ceasefire, Ethiopia has always been above board, forthright and always prepared to comply fully with what is provided for in the OAU Framework Agreement. In all this, even though the victim of aggression, Ethiopia has demonstrated its full commitment to peace and to the peaceful resolution of the crisis imposed on our country by Eritrea.

It is in the light of this that Ethiopia has been deeply disappointed for some time by the reaction of the Security Council to the Eritrean aggression which has failed to reflect any sympathy for the victim of this unlawful act and breach of the peace.

The Security Council has now chosen to go even further and has thus decided - as it did in its latest statement on the crisis - to remind us, as if we needed reminding, that we have the primary responsibility for feeding our people. This is as gratuitous as it is unfair.

Over the last eight years - until our effort was interrupted by the Eritrean aggression - Ethiopia had no greater priority than fighting against poverty and for economic development. We concentrated on activities designed to promote food security in our country and to avoid being caught unawares by the vagaries of nature to which our traditional farming has been exposed. We invested as much as practically possible on strategic food reserves and on early warning. These and other steps that we have been taking in our country as a Government are hardly unknown to many on the Security Council. We do also acknowledge the role that many within the international community have played in assisting us in our endeavour to carry out these programmes successfully.

It is in fact while we were engaged in these noble activities that our country became the target of Eritrean aggression. It was also because we chose to protect these programmes which are dear to us that we decided to exercise maximum patience for close to nine months after the Eritrean aggression, and in the face of the occupation of part of our sovereign territory.

But our patience could not bear fruit. Not only because of Eritrea's intransigence but also because of the failure of collective security. It was not only during the existence of the League of Nations that Ethiopia had the misfortune of witnessing how it could not count on collective security. Ethiopia has been made to go through the same experience once again. It is the United Nations that has failed Ethiopia this time. Ethiopia's plea for nine months fell on deaf ears. Our resolve not to be distracted from our preoccupation with poverty alleviation could find no support in the face of the Security Council's preoccupation with appeasing the aggressor. What options did Ethiopia have under these circumstances other than exercising its right of self-defence? This, I am convinced you would agree, is one of the primary responsibilities of all self-respecting sovereign nations.

It is, however, the implication - though their full meaning is not very clear - of some of the ideas contained in the latest statement of the Security Council that must be a source of concern, not only to Ethiopia but to all those who attach great value to the United Nations and have reposed confidence and trust in the United Nations. It is only the rich, the Council's statement appears to suggest, that have the legitimate right to protect and defend their rights as sovereign nations. This would amount to using double standards which can never be acceptable because it is our conviction that all, both the rich and the poor, have the legitimate right of self-defence. If that also explains why the Council has shown no concern about Eritrea's aggression against Ethiopia until now, then those like Ethiopia who face such aggression and against whom international crime is committed can indeed count on little support from the international community, including from the Council. This no doubt does not augur well for the future of international peace and security and for developing a solid basis for the rule of law internationally.

(Signed) Seyoum MESFIN
Minister of Foreign Affairs